

First Parish Church Holds 1832 Service



L-r, Harriet Marston, Ginny Seaver, Reed Walsh, Ruth Pratt, the Rev. Robert Walsh and a kneeling Daniel Webster (Richard Stott) at the 1832 service at The First Parish Church.

On Sunday, April 4, The First Parish Church held its worship service in the style of 1832 as part of the church's year-long celebration of its 350th anniversary.

Many members of the congregation dressed for the day in costumes appropriate to the period of 150 years ago, including the Rev. Robert Walsh, who appeared in the pulpit wearing a black frock coat and breeches, white stockings and silver buckle shoes, and a black stovepipe hat.

Children attended the service with their parents, and a highlight of the morning was a visit by Senator Daniel Webster, portrayed by Richard Stott, formerly of Harrison St., now of Sandwich.

"Mr. Webster" explained to the parish members that as U.S. Senator from Massachusetts (in 1832) and a resident of Marshfield, he wished to address the townspeople of Duxbury. Using historical material researched by church member Irene Sherwood, Stott recalled famous incidents of Daniel Webster's career and described Duxbury's importance as a shipbuilding and trading center during that time.

Mr. Walsh's sermon described the separation of the New England churches into the Unitarian and Congregationalist branches, which occurred during that period. He pointed out that the Duxbury church, under the leadership of the Rev. John Allyn, who was minister from 1785 to 1833, avoided the controversy and bitterness which divided many other New England churches.

Many of the details for the service were based on the description of Duxbury churches contained in the autobiography of Mary Livermore, a famous Universalist and early advocate of women's rights, who lived in Duxbury at the time. There was no organ music to accompany the hymns, as there was no organ in the Third Meetinghouse, which at that time occupied the site of the present church on Tremont St. Instead, Amy Bayer played the violin to accompany the hymns, as did the choir director in 1832.

The congregation sang hymns from the actual hymn books of the period, a hymnal first printed in 1830, 100 copies of which were recently discovered in a cabinet at the church.

The parlor of the Parish House was decorated with historical paintings, prints and documents describing the church and the town at that time, loaned from the King Caesar House by the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society.

The 1832 service was developed through a great deal of work by the church's 350th committee, under the leadership of Pamela Campbell Smith and Peter Smith. It was one of a series of historical worship services marking the centuries since the church's founding in 1632 as the second church in the Plymouth Colony.

In March a service in the style of 1932 was held. Next month, a service in the style of 1732, recalling life in the mid-colonial period, will be held. The public is invited to all the historical services.

On June 6 a pilgrimage on foot from Plymouth to Duxbury will be held, recalling the route taken by the early settlers of the town when they returned to Plymouth every Sunday to worship before the gathering of the Duxbury church. The pilgrimage will culminate in a worship service at the church in the manner of 1632.

In October the church plans a Founders Thanksgiving weekend, to which descendants of church members and the early families of the town will be invited. Persons interested in participating in any way in the June pilgrimage and 1632 service or the Founders Thanksgiving weekend may call Mrs. Campbell Smith (934-6492) or the church office (934-6532).